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A Conversation with Sasha Goudriaan '96 by Bruce McKinnon '90

I recently had a fun chat with my colleague Sasha Goudriaan. She's been a registered massage therapist for 23 years, and though we've worked together at Sutherland-Chan, where Sasha has been a teacher for about a dozen of those years, this was my first time spent unearthing some of the details of her life and career path.

Born in Calgary, Sasha moved to B.C. at a young age. Her father ran a restaurant in the North Vancouver community of Deep Cove. It was here that the seeds of her massage therapy career were planted.

Adjacent to her father's restaurant business was a massage practitioner. "Because it was the '70s and the parenting style was benevolent neglect, I had to entertain myself as a young kid, and I spent time just hanging out. I think I was maybe five years old, and I used to skip kindergarten and spend time at his clinic." The person next door was actually Peter Levine, who now runs traumahealing.org. Small world?! Later as a teenager, she babysat for massage therapists, one of whom was the president of the BC massage association, so her close proximity to massage therapy has been pretty much life-long.

Before moving to Toronto in 1994, Sasha spent four years in Montreal. "I always wanted to go to massage school, but I thought I should have a little bit of a life first, so I lived in Montreal, played, went to school, listened to music, was a free spirit. In the old days, to get into Sutherland-Chan, they recommended you had some science credits. So I was at Concordia doing biology and I also took some kinesiology courses, to satisfy the admission requirements."

"When I moved to Toronto to go to S-C, I was certain that I would be in the city for just the two years. I didn't think I would like it, but as it turned out, I *love* Toronto! I don't think I will ever leave."

Sasha began her massage therapy career in a multidisciplinary clinic, where she worked for several years alongside a medical doctor, chiropractor, naturopath, physiotherapist, acupuncturist and others. It was a supportive and creative environment. "Because there were so many different practitioners, if you weren't busy you were hanging out with the physios, or if they weren't busy we'd be exchanging techniques or massages, so that was super fun."





“I also worked at Toronto Western Hospital for about five years in the Altum Health Clinic. They do some really interesting programs there, including specialty programs where they work with fractures, or amputations, so as a massage therapist I got to see some great stuff, as well as some really stressed-out hospital workers.”

Sasha now divides her time between teaching and her private practice. “My private practice is pretty varied, though a large number of the people I see come for lymphatic drainage, often post-cancer treatment, which is an interesting group to work with. I really enjoy that – there is a huge variety in peoples’ experiences, their ages, and their specific treatment needs. That’s what I think is so great about this work; we can offer a lot in terms of support, and help people feel more comfortable in their bodies.”

One of Sasha’s teaching commitments involves being a Clinical Instructor for the Breast Specialty Clinic, where there is a lot of technical crossover from her private practice. “The Breast Clinic here is amazing. I’ve been with it for 8-9 years. There’s just such a need out there for this type of clinic. And everybody who comes into the clinic or hears about it says *why didn’t I know about this before?* One of the things I love about the clinic is that it’s accessible to people because it’s affordable, so it’s a wonderful offering from the school. One of the unfortunate things about massage therapy is that it is not integrated into our health care, and for a lot of people who are paying out of pocket, it’s just not that affordable.”

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As an aside, I referred someone I treat to the Breast Clinic as they began gender transitioning. They were thoroughly impressed with the expert care received, so much so, they requested to attend for a second 9-week series of treatments. At a follow-up with their doctor about a year after the surgery, the surgeon expressed how well the scars had healed. As Sasha says, "That's the thing, it's about getting the treatment started right from the beginning. I think there are more surgeons who are becoming more aware of lymph drainage and scar work, particularly in the cosmetic fields. Hopefully, as more physicians become aware, this type of therapy will become even more accessible." Horacio Cafferata '10, was a student therapist in this clinic and can attest to the importance of early treatment intervention. His practice includes specialty scar work in a plastic surgeon's clinic, here in Toronto.

When she is not teaching, or treating, or hanging out enjoying Toronto and environs, Sasha and colleague, Cathy Fournier '90, may be found presenting continuing education courses on pelvic health care, most recently in Halifax. There are currently two levels to the training and the work is geared to treatment for both women and men. "It's been more recently that pelvic health has been recognized as an issue and people seem more willing to talk about it. Even six or seven years ago, there were not that many pelvic health physios in Toronto. There's so much soft tissue work that needs to be done and who better to do it than massage therapists? I know a lot of physios do the internal work, but they may be limited in their time with regards to doing both internal and external treatment. This is an area where I think there is great potential for MTs and PTs to collaborate."

At the top of this piece, I used the word *unearthing* deliberately, because Sasha would be the last person to jump up and tell you about all the interesting things she has accomplished. A committed life-long learner, Sasha recently completed a degree in adult education from Brock University, but the event was so momentous, she has trouble recalling when, exactly, her degree was conferred. "I think it was 2017? Actually, it was a really good course. I took it part-time, over, I think it was five years? What was really good, was that because I was teaching here, I was able to bring what I was learning right into the classroom to apply it. Honestly, I could go to school forever, for anything. School is super fun!"



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